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SUBJECT: BEST OF TIMES, WORST OF TIMES: KOSOVO PAST AND
PRESENT ASSEMBLY HEADS TO VISIT US

Ref: A) Pristina 0204 B) 04 Pristina 0406

Sensitive but unclassified; please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) removed Nexhat Daci as Kosovo Assembly president on March 10, 2006, and replaced him with Kule Berisha. Both will visit the United States in the coming week. Their diametrically-opposed leadership styles engender continued criticism for Daci and inter-party praise for Berisha. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Nexhat Daci and Kule Berisha, former and current Kosovo Assembly presidents, both intend to travel to the United States in the coming week. Berisha comes armed with his reputation as a serious and honest politician (ref A) and an exceptional track record of creating a new democratic, consensual atmosphere in the Assembly. Daci's legacy as president of the Assembly, on the other hand, was characterized by a heavy-handed, dictatorial manner and continued flaunting of rules of procedure and sometimes decorum (ref B). In his inaugural speech to the Assembly, Berisha stressed his position as the "first among equals" in the Assembly; a direct contrast to Daci's habit of turning off microphones while members were speaking, a complaint often cited by Serb representatives for their boycott. Berisha's visit, his first to Washington, has been set up by a former National Albanian American Council (NAAC) member, relying on U.S. government assistance in arranging meetings, while Daci's is sponsored by high-powered Albanian-American lobbying organizations. Both need high-level meetings and photo-ops while there to enhance their stature with Kosovo's public - and in Daci's case, show that he is not at odds with the U.S.

13. (SBU) Daci is reportedly traveling to the United States to meet with LDK constituencies, as he fights for his political life in the LDK and in Kosovo politics. Following the January 21 death of LDK's founder former President Ibrahim Rugova, Daci, a steadfast Rugova loyalist who Rugova handpicked as Assembly president in December 2001, fashioned himself as presidential successor, creating and welcoming foreign dignitaries as the head of a largely symbolic and controversial funeral committee. These actions earned him more critics within the party, which replaced him as Assembly

President on March 10. Since receiving a March endorsement for party president from head of the influential LDK Youth Forum, Daci has canvassed Kosovo in stump speeches, often busing in his own supporters from outside locales.

¶4. (SBU) Although consistently polling high among Kosovars, Daci's egocentric and often heavy-handed style has caused resentment within his party as he campaigns to become the president of LDK. Eqrem Kreyziu, a vice-president of the LDK and mayor of Prizren, is traveling with Berisha to the United States, not Daci. Local press is enjoying the LDK's internal squabbles, painting it as a battle between "Rugovists" led by Daci and "Institutionalists" (described as Berisha, Kreyziu, and Kosovo President Fatah Sejdiu). Not surprisingly, those opposed to Daci such as Melihate Termkolli, Minister for Public Services, take umbrage at Daci's co-opting of Rugova's legacy, about whom Daci had little good to say while alive. While in office, he has also, in private, criticized compromises by the Kosovo Negotiating Team for final status discussions, of which he is no longer a member, for "turning Kosovo into Cyprus." Because of the status discussions, the actual election could be postponed until next year, although OSCE rules state that they should occur sometime this summer.

¶5. (SBU) Stakes are high for Kosovo as the battle for control of its largest party continues. The LDK holds the majority of ministerial seats, Assembly seats and municipal presidency positions, and an influential place on the Negotiating Team. Daci's brief tenure on the team was marred by conflict.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

¶6. (SBU) Daci's image as a calm and wise, if firm and

relentless, person among his supporters is balanced by his detractors' view of him as narcissistic and power-hungry. Born in the village of Trnovac in Serbia's Presevo Valley, he is 62 years old. A tenured chemistry professor at the University of Pristina since 1984, he engendered a strong following among his students. Daci is believed to be among the wealthiest politicians and academicians in Kosovo. He is married to Zineta Daci, an economist and deputy chairman of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, and has three children. He speaks English.

¶7. (SBU) A steadfast, methodical and professionally humble politician effusive in his respect for the United States, Kola Berisha at first owed his party position to an unwritten LDK internal rule that a member of the party's vice-presidency be an Albanian Catholic. A prolific poet and prose writer, he graduated from the University of Pristina's law faculty. In March 1989, he was arrested and spent three months in prison in Belgrade and then Peja/Pec. He is married and a father of two. He does not speak English.

GOLDBERG